

The Alpha Games

Chapter 6 - A home comfort

Her eyes were closed to the rough wind whipping around her, wiping the tears from her cheeks. Stood at the cliff's edge, on the highest point of the island, Maddie was home. Those rocks were as familiar to her as her childhood bedroom and, if she wanted to, she could walk the edge blindfolded without a single stumble. Many times, those cliffs had wiped away her tears and that day was no different. Below her, she could hear the swells and breaks of the sea against the rocks, churning up white foam that skittered across the surface before the next wave lapped again.

The sea was relatively calm, its movement a gentle shimmer in her ears. The salty air was bitter on her lips, and she inhaled it like a life force. Too long she had been away from its comfort. Too long she had been on the mainland and away from home.

The sharp drop, a mere step before her, was one of the many reasons for Silver Moon's long lasting strength. It was a thirty metre climb for whoever dared to approach from the sea, creating an impenetrable fortress at the pack's back. That left most of the pack's resources to protect the beaches and docks in the East. However, whichever direction an enemy could attack from, they'd be spotted by the warriors on watch and the island's defences would be ready by the time they made it to shore. Once, in Silver Moon's history, a rival pack attempted to destroy them with a siege, but the island is self-sufficient and could sustain its 1500 inhabitants. Only luxuries came from the mainland and, during wartime, the wolves were happy to go without for the sake of the pack.

Maddie turned, her heels biting the edge of the rocks. She looked out over her pack. She loved her home, she always had done. Even before her training to become the next Silver Moon Luna, a deep loyalty to her wolves had taken root within her. It had been hard being away, but knowing she would be coming back at twenty-five to take over its leadership gave her comfort whenever she was homesick. She sighed, feeling her chest tighten. Though the Luna role, she had worked her whole life towards, was still hers, the choice of who would support her and be at her side for the remainder of her life had been stripped away.

She loved her pack, but how much pain could she bear if the wrong Alpha was at her side?

The order was a heavy weight on her shoulders which she let take her. With her arms spread wide, she tipped backwards, her stomach weightless as she went beyond her centre of gravity. At the last moment, she launched her body away from the rock, giving her enough clearance from the cliff side as she plummeted down. When she was little, she had barely been brave enough to jump from the eastern edges of the island, but once she had tasted the rush of the thirty metre drop, she could never resist feeling it again.

Air raced past her body as she flew towards the sea below. A smile spread her tear-stained cheeks wide as she took in every bubble of foam beneath her. Maddie sucked in a lungful of air and snapped into position at the last moment before the water broke her fall, catching her joy and cradling her in its comfort. Growing up on the Silver Moon island, made the sea her home as much as the land, and she let it wash away the sorrows to come. Its blue depths were vast and dangerous, but otherworldly in its calm.

Maddie stayed in its belly until her lungs burned, forcing her to re-surface. She gasped greedily at the air, a laugh on her lips. She closed her eyes to soak in the moment of every delectable drop of freedom that lapped against her skin. The sadness within her had quelled to a dull ache, replaced by the fire of life in her veins.

There was nothing she could do to prevent the Alpha Games from happening; once her father had made a decision, there would be no persuading him to change. However, that didn't take away her own mind and actions. Maddie didn't know how yet, but she wouldn't accept her choice being stolen like that. Whether she rigged the contests or delayed them until she found a compatible mate, she would fight fang and claw to have the Alpha that Silver Moon deserved. The Alpha that *she* deserved.

With determination flooding into her, the future Luna swam the edge of the island to a climbable section of cliff. She dragged herself out of the water, weighed down by her sodden clothes. Her muscles burned with the effort as she hauled herself up the rocks, their sharp edges biting into her palms, but finally she reached the top.

With a grunt, she pulled herself onto stable ground and rolled to her back, heavy pants heaving at her chest. It was only after three lungfuls of air did she

notice someone else sitting nearby. She tilted her head to face them and scowled.

“Did my father send you?”

Lewis was splayed out on the grass, only a couple of metres from where she had surfaced, a towel in hand. “No, but he debriefed us on next week and I knew where you’d be.”

Her stomach twisted at the sympathy in his voice. She didn’t want his pity and lurched to her feet. “Yeah, well, I thought cooling off would be better than getting myself exiled for attacking the Alpha.”

Both of them knew it was bullshit. She would never dare to lay a hand on her father. Not only did she respect him, but he wouldn’t give her any special treatment if she stood against him like that.

Lewis approached her cautiously, like she’d dive back into the comfort of the sea if he wasn’t careful. When she was in reach, he held her arms, keeping her on solid ground.

“Maddie, I’m so sorry.”

There was an ache in his voice that echoed the pain in her chest and she sagged into him, letting her friend wrap her in an embrace she didn’t realise she needed.

Maddie didn’t know how long he let her borrow his strength, all the while pretending his t-shirt was getting wet from the sea water, but when he drew back, her eyes were red and swollen.

Suddenly, Lewis dropped the towel over her head, and ruffled it with a chuckle. “Come on. I know what will take your mind off things.”